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INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS' FELLOWSHIP

**FROM VIRTUES AND VICES TO  
PASSIONATE VALUES**

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## FROM VIRTUES AND VICES TO PASSIONATE VALUES

### From 'virtues and vices' to 'values'

It is a common complaint these days that the country and western societies generally are increasingly immoral. The appalling crime statistics would seem to make that undeniable. But there is another side to this and it is the enormous concern among many in the population to 'do good' of some sort. Alongside the crime stories in the media we see just as many about people trying to resolve societal issues of various kinds, to save the ozone layer, the whale, the takahe or the kiwi or, most recently, opposing genetically modified foods. The concerns may not always be well founded or action well directed, but nonetheless we have here very genuine, and often very passionate, attempts to improve the situation for all New Zealanders in various ways.

We live, I suggest, in a time of contradiction between immorality and moral concern, between enormous outpourings of moral passion and moral confusion. The confusion arises from the urge to do good combined with the lack of any agreed basis for understanding what 'the good' might be or involve.

In education, talking about values has become something of a competitive sport in which participants claim to have better values and to talk more about them than others. It's almost got to the stage that if you don't mention values at least once in every paragraph you are liable to be accused of having the wrong values or not sufficiently appreciating their importance and all-pervasive nature. And the topic is not going to go away, if only because it comes up repeatedly in official education documents.

One important aspect of the current situation is the use of the word 'values' rather than terms like 'virtues and vices', 'right and wrong', which were commonly employed in earlier times but which came to be regarded by some as judgmental and authoritarian.<sup>1</sup> Since Nietzsche introduced the word 'values' in its current meaning, many writers have spoken of personal values but not of truth, of beliefs

but not of facts, of an individual's attitudes but not of right and wrong. The key new notion is that the value attached to a thing or concept is essentially an individual calculation. Values are something "which the individual has chosen or possesses rather than something which the individual seeks or responds to."<sup>2</sup> Here we run into another contradiction because many assert, often with much passionate language and denigration of all who might disagree, that certain values should be upheld and adopted by everybody. In education we see this contradiction in the upholding of some values along with, even in the same document, the requirement that all values be respected.<sup>3</sup>

One of the consequences of the language of values and the observation that all education is shot through with values is that all moral sentiments are reduced to a common currency – that of values – as if there were no conceptual difference between the value of, say, a coca cola and of honesty or self-discipline. The same word is used to cover aesthetic judgments, those of taste, about which there will always be wide and legitimate ranges of opinion and those behaviours which, at least until recent times, were considered to be either right or wrong. It converts the moral life into a supermarket in which we choose according to supposedly rational arguments but in fact do so according to what is currently fashionable.

The matter is exacerbated by the current tendency to advance the view that true liberal education involves getting rid of teacher authority and allowing children to follow their own inclinations. The actual consequences are usually quite the reverse of pupil autonomy. What happens is that children are open to the manipulation of the teacher. They also become excessively dependent on peer group approval, and one can read about the consequences of this in just about any daily newspaper. Another point is that children cannot in fact become critical of anything, including

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion see Himmelfarb, G (1995), *The Demoralization of Society – From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, Institute of Economic Affairs, London.

<sup>2</sup> Habgood, J (1990), "Are Moral Values Enough?", *British Journal of Educational Studies*, vol. XXXVIII, No. 2, May.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, Wellington, 1993) which requires the school curriculum to "recognise, respect, and respond to ... the values of all students" (p. 7). Yet it also requires schools to reinforce values such as "honesty, reliability, respect for others, respect for the law, tolerance, fairness, caring or compassion, non-sexism, and non-racism." The meaning and application of some of these particular values are debatable.

moral judgments, without first acquiring a great deal of knowledge, some of which is extremely tedious like knowing dates and sequences so the context in which moral judgments are made can be properly understood.

We have, in short, another Lessing's ditch<sup>4</sup>, not in this case between faith and history but between values and any extrinsic ground on which to form value judgments. It is small wonder that there is so much confusion. The confusion reflects the fact that human beings do want to do good. In Christian theology this might be asserted as evidence that humans are made in the image of God, that is having a personhood oriented to the origin and source of goodness and made to reflect that goodness. Saint Paul writes in chapter 1 of his letter to the Romans about the knowledge of God being made known to all people through His creation and about mankind's inherent understanding of impiety and wrong-doing.

Thus, as St Paul would, I think, affirm, it is not only Christians who hold that there are inherently human understandings of right and wrong. They can claim no monopoly of moral understanding. C S Lewis in perhaps his most powerful book, *The Abolition of Man*<sup>5</sup>, argues the case of Natural Law and gives many examples of a remarkably similar view among widely different religions and civilisations about what is right and wrong human behaviour. He was not, and this is important, seeking to establish the validity of Natural Law by the argument of common assent. Nor did he presuppose that all civilisations arose completely independently. What he was concerned to do is to tease out the implications of dispensing with Natural Law altogether. He warns that if we end up explaining away Natural Law we will find that we have explained away explanation. If we 'see through' everything then we end up with a wholly transparent world. "But a wholly transparent world is an

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"Tolerance", for example, tends to mean accepting uncritically rather than putting up with something of which one disapproves or with which one disagrees.

<sup>4</sup> The historic Christian concept of divine revelation is that it is objective intelligible disclosure. Much current European theology is based on the view that divine revelation is never communicated objectively – neither in historical occurrences nor in intelligible propositions but is always subjectively received through submissive response. This redefinition of divine revelation draws on speculative philosophical trends including those proposed by Lessing (1727-81) who argued that there can be no connection between the truth of religion and the events of history or, more formally, that the "accidental truths of history can never become the proof of the necessary truths of reason". This divide between faith and history became known as "Lessing's ditch".

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, C S (1978), *The Abolition of Man*, William Collins, Glasgow.

invisible world. To 'see through' everything is the same as not to see." But, as Lewis would want to affirm, that the consequences of something are dreadful does not mean that it is not true.

Humanity doesn't want to embrace boldly the dreadful, but still possibly true, consequences of the wholly transparent, invisible world without Natural Law. But nor does it want, in this postmodern world, to hang on to the old certainties and authorities of a religious age which are widely claimed to have passed their 'use-by' date and are no longer widely perceived as retaining any intellectual credibility.

## Moral inversion

Western society, particularly the English-speaking world, has been much affected by what Michael Polanyi<sup>6</sup> has called "moral inversion". This inversion comes about when "moral passion has been uprooted from its authoritative ground through rationalistic critique of transcendent moral obligation". In other words moral passion is severed from its basis in religious faith when people perceive that faith is no longer credible. The morally inverted person, says Polanyi, "has not merely performed a philosophical substitution of moral aims by material purposes, but is acting with the whole force of his homeless moral passions within a purely materialistic framework of purposes."

Thus modern man's moral passions are homeless in the sense of being detached from any external authority, but at the same time they must have their outlet. Without a supernatural basis, morality concerns itself exclusively with the things of this world and no longer with those of the kingdom of heaven. For many moral passion is directed almost solely at social and environmental betterment.

In the case of many church leaders this social concern is combined, in the view of Tom Torrance, "with a guilty detachment from an objective and divine source of moral obligation and a replacement of a personal religious ethic with a naturalistic ethic of self-determination in which man assumes absolute responsibility for himself."<sup>7</sup> Thus when the church loses confidence in a supernatural, transcendent source of power it becomes instead enmeshed in a struggle for political power. Tom Torrance again:

The vast slide of church leaders in recent times into something like an obsession with socio-moral concerns reflects (does it not?) a nagging sense of guilt over their own personal Christian convictions, which over-compensates for itself, not merely in loud protests of 'involvement', but in passionate moral extravagances and drives which [the churches'] modern critics have sometimes described as pathological moralistic excess. ... But what concerns me here is that moral inversion of this kind has so infected our Churches, especially Anglo-Saxon Churches, that our evangelical convictions are

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<sup>6</sup> Polanyi, M (1958), *Personal Knowledge*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

<sup>7</sup> Torrance, T (1975), *Theology in Reconciliation*, p 275-276.

submerged if not replaced by consciously meritorious involvement in socio-political issues, which is associated with a serious degeneration of genuine ethical substance and indeed a widespread moral laxity of the individual in society. Thus the moralistic externalisation of life in the Churches is concomitant with a fatal loss of spiritual depth. Or perhaps ... it is the atrophying of the soul, the deep inward emptiness, that forces people outward where they become absorbed in externalities on the surface of existence ...

Torrance insists that he should not be understood as asking for any curtailment by the churches of concern for any genuine human, moral or social need. What does particularly concern him is the churches' loss of belief in justification by grace as the "ethical disturbance that turns the world upside down" and the contradiction between their striving for political power and influence and their founder's own total rejection of every value-system based on power. Indeed Torrance reminds us that Jesus was crucified by those who bitterly resented his refusal to have anything to do with their political theology.

The Christian churches certainly do little to maintain the credibility of the Christian faith by their divisions and the renunciation by many of their leading figures of the main tenets of their religion. Only last month the head of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Bishop Richard Holloway, was quoted as saying that promiscuity may not be immoral and that "Bringing God into the moral debate is problematic, no matter how we respond. If we think of God as dictator of our moral systems, we run into difficulties."<sup>8</sup>

If the Bishop has been reported correctly, we have here a rejection by a leading churchman of the highest moral authority of all, God, from our debates on morality. He places an unbridgeable ditch between faith and human behaviour. Bishop Holloway is not, of course, the first leading churchman to say such things and will not be the last. For him and many others, humans are to decide their own morality, their values, without any external assistance and certainly not under divine direction.

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<sup>8</sup> Gledhill, R (1999), "Promiscuity may not be immoral, says bishop", *The Dominion*, 29 July. It was reassuring to see from a later *Dominion* report (of 9 August) that Bishop Holloway's views secured no support from several New Zealand church leaders.

But if the old certainties, the old authorities, are to be discarded, what will take their place? Few can accept the awful consequences of a morally invisible world as portrayed so chillingly by Lewis. We still yearn for community, but community requires common understandings about how life should be lived. We are still moral beings even if we reject that this has anything to do with being in the image of a moral, personal God. Few want to follow Nietzsche's conclusion that the only lucid response to the 'death' of God is a thorough-going amorality: most non-believers prefer to live lives that are inconsistent with their unbelief like the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Englishman who is reported to have said that he didn't believe in God but hoped nevertheless "to live and die a Christian gentleman."<sup>9</sup> And perhaps we have this uncomfortable feeling that without a moral universe the individual can have no moral value. Most people, I suspect, like to feel they have some significance in the wider cosmic scheme of things.

#### **What then should be the basis for values in the school curriculum?**

All this leaves something of a crisis for moral education in schools. The belief, widespread in Victorian England, that Western society can discard Christian doctrine without discarding Christian morality has proved illusory. Moreover, the Natural Law is under attack because mankind is now in control, is it not, over nature, and no longer under its dictates. Perhaps we humans can now build a moral order based on our own superior knowledge and mastery of nature and one free of the 'myths' which propped up the moral authorities of the past. But if we create a new moral structure will not that in turn be seen as dictatorial? We have many examples in political matters of today's oppressed becoming tomorrow's oppressors, often by violent revolution. Why should we not expect the same to happen in the moral sphere as old authorities – the Jewish and Christian canons, the Koran, God, whatever – are rejected and replaced by new ones?

In fact, I think this is precisely what is happening. We are seeing the emergence of alternative moral authorities, often with dictatorial inclinations. In many cases single-issue interest groups seek to push their own philosophies and values about, say, the environment, cultural, racial or gender issues, on the rest of us. If there is

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<sup>9</sup> Skidelsky, E (1999), "England's Doubt", *Prospect*, July.

an connecting link between much of the concerns of the interest groups it is relativism – the view that all viewpoints are of equal value. But here of course lies contradictions both in the marginalisation of non-relativist positions, including that of historic Christianity, and in the vehemence with which some viewpoints are promoted as indubitably correct and the denunciation of those who dare to reject them.

Given the near state monopoly of schooling, special interest groups can only achieve their educational aims through government action including through the mandated school curricula. And in this they have been, in my view, remarkably successful. For example, we find:

- in *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* a child-centred approach to pedagogy, the promotion of student autonomy in respect of values, and much emphasis on the importance of the 'correct' attitudes in respect of race, gender and ethnicity;
- in the English curriculum a stress on gender and cultural balance in the choice of texts but little on the importance of literary merit or of good grammar and syntax;
- in the Science curriculum a constructivism which goes beyond pedagogy and borders on the notion that knowledge is essentially socially constructed and hence relativistic;
- in the Social Studies curriculum a proper emphasis on the importance of minority cultures coupled with an astonishing lack of acknowledgement of the wealth of our inherited Western cultural traditions, the requirement that Maori perspectives accord with those of local Maori, the promotion of a particular interpretation of the Treaty, and values exploration and clarification; and
- in the Health and Physical Education curriculum the promotion of spirituality without theology, the concepts of well-being and personal

identity which are presented as if they have nothing to do with any possible religious understandings of human personhood, and self-worth with no independent standard against which the worth of self is to be assessed.

Much more could be said about each of these curricula, and more can be found in the various Education Forum reviews and submissions.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to remember here that we are not talking about a state school system which is one of several and a situation in which most parents can choose a school which reflects their own world view and educational preferences. We have compulsory schooling and a state system with a near monopoly of it. Most religious schools have been absorbed into the state system though with ability to retain their own religious or other ethos. But many integrated schools are heavily oversubscribed, which says something both about the wish of many parents for a religious school environment for the education of their children and about the inability of those schools to expand to meet parental preferences. The private school sector is now tiny and caters for less than 4 percent of the school population.

The state curriculum is mandated for all state schools – integrated or otherwise – that is for about 96 percent of school children. The state thus has enormous potential influence through the school curriculum for asserting its chosen values on the vast majority of New Zealand children who have to attend state schools and whose parents do not have the means to choose a private school alternative. With great potential influence there should go a great sense of responsibility and, I would suggest, great caution. The government is rightly concerned about how those using so-called natural monopolies like electricity and telephone lines carry out their business so as not to abuse their position vis-à-vis consumers. Is it exercising similar care in the case of its own virtual monopoly on schooling with respect to parents? Is it acting with great caution so as to respect parental wishes, to act *in loco parentis*. Or it pushing its own barrow of values, if necessary *contra parentem*?

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<sup>10</sup> See Education Forum: *English in the New Zealand Curriculum – A Submission on the Draft* (1994); *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum – A Submission on the Draft* (1995); *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum – A Submission on the Revised Draft* (1996); *Health and Physical Education – A Submission on the Draft* (1998); Kelly, P (1995) *Science in the New Zealand Curriculum – A Review*, Education Forum, Auckland, November.

In my view, the state, or perhaps more accurately its official advisors, have, as we have seen, promoted strong views in a number of curricular areas on matters previously thought to be the prime responsibility of families and community organisations, including churches. They reflect, I suspect, the views of only a minority of New Zealanders, particularly those of education officials and their advisors and consultants in university education departments and colleges of education. And this is not, I should say an unusual situation. In all sorts of areas the state is intervening in matters which were previously resolved by individuals or private organisations without recourse to government. I refer here to the government involvement in relations between employer and employee through the Employment Court, and its involvement through various state agencies in privacy, race relations, and in a very wide range of disputes through ombudsmen, the Human Rights Commission and the Health and Disability Commissioner.

And this urge to control is nowhere more evident than in schooling. Moreover, it is in schooling that the state has to be particularly careful because it is dealing not with adults but with the young and impressionable, as well as, of course, with parents who have a wide range of views about what their children should learn and the manner and environment in which they should be taught.

There are two arguments which reinforce this desire to control. One is the argument that because schools are perceived to be among the few remaining stable institutions in society more and more responsibilities should be loaded on to them for forming the minds and attitudes of the next generation of New Zealanders. Schools are now to be the shock troops in the fight against all forms of social ills, such as alcohol abuse<sup>11</sup> and the destruction of the environment<sup>12</sup>. School children are now to be "socially critical" and to adopt a "socio-ecological perspective". Personally I think

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<sup>11</sup> Media release dated 29 July 1999 headed "Education Key to Responsible Alcohol Use say Ministers" in the names of the Hon Nick Smith, minister of education, and the Hon Tony Ryall, minister of youth affairs. It says that officials are to develop a suitable package of material about responsible alcohol use for secondary schools that would integrate with the new Health and Physical Education curriculum and existing programmes.

<sup>12</sup> Media release dated 3 August 1999, headed "Bringing Conservation to the Classroom – Environmental Education Guidelines Launched" in the name of the Hon Dr Nick Smith, minister of education and minister of conservation. It states that environmental guidelines for schools would over time "make a huge

such views are patronising on parents and many community organisations, including religious ones. It is also, I suggest, dangerous in that it blurs the vital distinction between education and indoctrination. Further it assumes that education officials have some sort of prescience about the future, some special revelation perhaps, which is denied to the rest of us.

Again and again we see government decisions about the allocation of more money to schools so they can resolve some social disorder elsewhere in society as if all problems are in the end technical, not moral, and therefore amenable to technical solutions. The *reductio ad absurdum* of this technocratic optimism is surely the new Health and Physical Education curriculum which aims to address the issues of youth suicide, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy while offering a spirituality without the theology that might provide some meaning and hope in life and offering a do-it-yourself system for values which cannot provide any secure sense of behavioural boundaries, of right and wrong. I wonder sometimes whether we are all that far from Lewis's description of a world in which all Natural Law is explained away and in which mankind only succeeds in abolishing itself.

The second argument which gives succour to those who seek to control is that we should define educational outcomes. Now some outcomes *do* lend themselves to definition and description, but others do not. But today we do not seem to make this important distinction: we want to know exactly what effects schools should be having on children not only in the cognitive domain, which is problematic enough, but to some extent in the affective one as well. We have abandoned the view that education is essentially open-ended, that we cannot predict the effects it will have on individuals and shouldn't try to do so because all children are different and react differently even to the same experiences. The present view seems to be that education is closed and predictable. Quite when and how this shift happened I do not know. But it is an extraordinary step to have taken and one that has been taken, I suspect, with no more than superficial investigation by our well-meaning but misguided education officials. I would be astonished if a proper analysis of the issue was ever put to ministers, yet it is of far greater significance than many matters which are routinely put to cabinet and voted upon in the parliament.

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contribution to improving New Zealand's environment." and that "Environmental

Let me tease this out a little bit further because the implications are far-reaching. The traditional view is that one should expose children to a wide range of general education. Leonie Kramer described such education as follows:

A sound general education – and also a broadly cultural one – involves the systematic, continual, strenuous exercise of mental powers in following and scrutinizing arguments, examining fine shades of meaning in the written and spoken word, detecting underlying assumptions, and, not least, relishing the insights into human experience and accumulated wisdom which the whole of human history (including pre-history) has to offer.<sup>13</sup>

We will hope that such an education will turn out cultivated, decent citizens – but cultivation and decency can take many forms. It is an educational approach which is unending and which is not expected to lead to immediate and recognisable results, and in this respect is open and very modest in its ability to predict what the effects will be for individuals. A broad and well-fashioned curriculum is offered, based on accumulated wisdom of the past and present, and in the knowledge that the effects on the learning and dispositions of individual students will vary enormously. Now the modern trend is quite different. It starts at the results of education, with outcomes, and not with content, indeed content is seen as passé<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, outcomes are divided into little bits and organised into levels and, for assessment purposes, credit values are attached. Now all this has enormous consequences for learning and assessment many of which do not seem to have occurred to ministry officials. However, my concern this evening is with the effects of this approach on values and values education.

I would note in passing, however, that the "knowledge society" has taken over from "seamless education" as the latest educational nostrum, but no one seems to have stopped to ask how knowledge is to be gained in the absence of curriculum content.

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education is a vital area that New Zealand children should learn about (sic)."

<sup>13</sup> Kramer, L (1993), "General and Vocational Education", *Education Monitor*, Spring.

<sup>14</sup> The government's Green Paper "Assessment for Success in Primary Schools", Ministry of Education, May 1998, notes that education policy in OECD countries is shifting in focus to the results or outcomes of education and that "In New Zealand, the shift from a content-based curriculum to an outcomes-based curriculum indicates this change of focus." No reasons are given – the shift is clearly seen as wholly desirable and non-problematic.

We seem to be aiming at producing generations of students like Mark Studdock, Lewis's character in his *That Hideous Strength*<sup>15</sup>, whose education:

... had been neither scientific nor classical – merely 'Modern'. The severities both of abstraction and of high human tradition had passed him by: and he had neither peasant shrewdness nor aristocratic honour to help him. He was a man of straw, a glib examinee in subjects that require no exact knowledge (he had always done well on Essays and General Papers) ... ."

### **Where do we go from here?**

In the pluralist, multicultural society in which we live, there are always going to be debates about values, and I don't think there are any simple answers. I doubt if many of us would want to live in a theocracy. Previous examples aren't encouraging – consider ancient Israel, Calvin's Geneva and the Ayatollah's Iran. It's now impossible anyway, though there seem to be occasional yearnings for a lost Christendom among some church leaders. But the present situation is most unsatisfactory, and I would like to suggest several ways forward. We need to consider how we can avoid the charge of dictatorial imposition – of replacing one set of dictates by another – while still providing a clear basis for the moral education of the young.

First and foremost, I consider parents should have reasonable choice about the schooling of their children. There are competing belief systems and different views about pedagogy and the upbringing of children. Quite wide divergences of view can be tolerated within an open, democratic society without putting social cohesion at risk. So the single most important step in my view is the introduction of a funding system which allows parents to take a state funding entitlement to whatever school they choose – government or private. The conditions imposed on private schools would need to be minimal otherwise we would just continue with the status quo. The main emphasis should be on the publication of cognitive achievement scores. I suggest we can leave most, if not all, of the rest to the informed judgment of parents.

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<sup>15</sup> Lewis, C S (1972), *That Hideous Strength*, Pan Books, London, p 109. I am indebted to

For government schools different considerations apply because they clearly cannot, in this secular society, promote a particular religious or philosophical world view. What then should be the guidelines for values education in government schools?

First, government schools can be expected to reinforce certain agreed virtues necessary for the preservation and continuance of civil society and a democratic way of life. These should include honesty and respect for others. Tolerance, in the proper sense of putting up with what one doesn't approve or with which one disagrees, is also very important. But the notion in *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* that all values should be "respected" is clearly nonsensical: some values are widely seen as morally opprobrious and to pretend otherwise is to demean the intelligence of parents and, indeed, of children.

The government needs to be cautious about requiring reinforcement of values such as non-sexism and non-racism, advocated in *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework*. If it does so it cannot, as it presently does in the Social Studies curriculum for example, also uphold certain cultures but not others or uphold cultures which maintain traditional gender roles. "Social justice", advocated in the Social Studies and the Health and Physical Education curricula, sounds benign – who, after all, wants social injustice? – but is highly problematic and likely to encourage the promotion of partisan views about how society should be organised.

It greatly concerns me that so many of these apparently benign, but in fact deeply problematic, values should be slipped into our curricula with little if any debate. One problem is that to question them is to open oneself to attack as racist, sexist or whatever. We need clear-sighted, courageous and intelligent leadership, and unfortunately the ministry is not providing this.

Secondly, I am not at all sure that specific teaching about values in government schools is helpful. Here again, the government gets into muddles. For example it cannot advocate both value freedom, inherent in the values clarification it advocates,

as well as enjoining the fostering of social justice. Geoffrey Partington<sup>16</sup> has pointed out that values clarification can be used as a propaganda tool in a two-stage process for conditioning children. The first stage is to convince children that the values they received from families and churches are simply matters of opinion from which they are entitled to diverge. Once children are emptied of these traditional values, the way is open to convince them that some things in society really are wrong and they should protest about them. "Moral relativism can be a tactic used in preparing for a corrupt moral absolutism, and this possibility should be guarded against."

Values can, in fact, be studied very effectively through literature. The whole range of human emotions and dispositions can, for example, be found in Shakespeare – courage and cowardice, loyalty and betrayal, love and lust, anger and remorse, and much else. Jane Austin's novels, in which there is a current revival of interest, traverses a wide range of relationships between men and women.

Professor C K Stead<sup>17</sup> has argued that in so far as gender equity is a current issue:

... it is appropriate that it will be discussed, like any other, *as it arises* in the consideration of particular [literary] works ... [and it would be] quite wrong for a syllabus to require ... that any particular conclusion should be arrived at, or that any one view of the matter is right. [The study of] English in a democracy must serve all the members of that democracy equally, including those whose views the government, the education bureaucracy, or even the majority, happen to deplore.

He also observes that the encounter with literature offers:

... a range of experiences beyond the powers of any one person to live through in many lifetimes. The very best of poetry or fiction exposes readers, as often as they care to open a good book, to the influence of minds and sensibilities finer, more developed, richer, than they are likely to meet more than once or twice, if ever, in real life.

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<sup>16</sup> Education Forum (1995), *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum – A Submission on the Draft*, Education Forum, Auckland, August. Dr Partington was the principal author.

<sup>17</sup> Education Forum (1994), *English in the New Zealand Curriculum – A submission on the Draft*, Education Forum, Auckland, April. Professor C K Stead was the principal author.

The problem here is the relative indifference shown by our education bureaucrats to the immense storehouse of Anglo-Celtic literature with its roots going back thousands of years into European and Middle Eastern history. The postmodern view prevails that all cultures are equal, though in the view of some education officials minority, indigenous cultures seem to be 'more equal'. Also the promotion of European culture is seen as the promotion of cultural hegemony and male hierarchical dominance. This is a tragic loss on many counts, not least for the missed opportunity to consider human virtues and vices within the context of literary richness and not of the banality of 'values clarification'. But I would also want to insist that the study of literature is a real discipline and involves genuine forms of knowledge. Moral sentiments should be considered as they arise and as part of the study of literature. To use literary works as devices for the advancement of some moral or social programme is to betray education.

We are still left, I suggest, with the issue of education in civic virtue. To what extent is it a legitimate part of school education, and how is it to be achieved without falling into the trap of indoctrination? In large measure the answer is to proceed in stages, and in this civics education is no different from education in anything else. Much of it can be learnt in history, including the history of the development of the British constitution and its translation to New Zealand and elsewhere in the Commonwealth and the development of other types of constitutional arrangements including the French and American republics.

I suggest that it is entirely legitimate in the early stages of education to emphasise the positive aspects of New Zealand's history and society – and there is, in my view, much to be proud of – allowing criticism to come later. Similarly, simple, more clear cut, issues of morality can be allowed to arise in the early stages leaving the moral ambiguities and dilemmas of much of life to be encountered when children are older.

One issue about moral education which is apparent to just about every teacher and parent, but not seemingly to the drafters of our new curricula, is that children's moral development advances by habituation and by having sound moral values modeled to them in a conducive atmosphere. James Q Wilson has written that:

... children do not learn morality by learning maxims or clarifying values. They enhance their natural sentiments by being regularly induced by families, friends and institutions to behave in accord with the most obvious standards of right conduct – fair dealing, reasonable self-control and personal honesty. A moral life is perfected by practice more than precept; children are not taught so much as habituated.<sup>18</sup>

In this he is saying no more than what Aristotle said over 2000 years ago, and many others have repeated since. Thus the new Health and Physical Education curriculum is quite wrong to infer that clarification and exploration of values are by themselves sufficient to achieve the growth in the attitudes and values called for in the curriculum. The obstacle here is the view, implied in some of the curricular documents, of the pupil as morally autonomous.

Religious education is another thorny issue for government schools, but needn't be so. It is entirely appropriate that children learn about the main world religions, especially those represented in New Zealand. There need be no sense of proselytising if a descriptive (or phenomenological or 'religious studies') approach is adopted. It is absurd that the cross should be removed from hot-cross buns and children denied the knowledge to enable them to understand its significance for Christians. It is also quite obvious that an understanding of religions, particularly Christianity, is essential to understanding much of our cultural heritage, including literature, music and art. Understanding religions is also important if students are to understand the basis for the moral judgments of their adherents. Spiritual development or formation is quite different and should not be attempted by government schools, though they can, as many now do, allow time for this to be undertaken informally and on a voluntary basis.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Wilson, J Q (1993), *The Moral Sense*, The Free Press, New York, p. 249.

<sup>19</sup> Draft Achievement Standards for Health/Hauora include outcomes such as "Students will be able to examine the influences on Hauora/well-being". The Health and Physical Education curriculum defines "well-being" as "encompassing the physical, mental and emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of health". Hauora is said to be a Maori philosophy of health unique to New Zealand: it also includes four dimensions including "spiritual well-being" which, it is acknowledged, is for some people linked to a particular religion. It would appear that some sort of religionless spirituality is to be fostered, or any rate taught, in government schools.

A final point is that many of the virtues that are required for education are also those that are required for success in much of life – in sport and work and in human relationships generally. Thus it makes good sense to identify the attitudes and values that are inherent in educational success, and it removes much of the controversy about 'whose values' schools should be promoting: schools should promote the values necessary to, and inherent in, good education. These would include self-discipline, hard work and honesty. Oakeshott<sup>20</sup> talked about disinterested curiosity, patience, exactness, industry, concentration, doubt, sensibility to small differences, the ability to recognise intellectual elegance and the disposition to submit to refutation. Gramsci<sup>21</sup>, the Italian Marxist, emphasised diligence, precision, concentration and the need for the mechanical repetition of disciplined and methodical acts. Both these writers would stress that the child is being initiated into a preexisting world – Oakeshott wrote about education as being a conversation between the generations. We find very few of these emphases in the new curricular documents. Indeed *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* places children at the "centre of all teaching and learning" and, as I have already noted, sees them as being morally autonomous, so yet again we find a stumbling block to what, I suspect, many parents and teachers would favour.

Similarly, it is entirely sensible to identify and require the behaviours necessary for living in a school community. These include respect for teachers, getting on with other children, constructive ways of dealing with disagreement, punctuality, tidiness, and much else – and again such behaviours and the relevant dispositions translate readily into life outside and beyond school.

## **Conclusions**

My conclusion is that on the issue of values education, or I would prefer to say, moral education, the situation as regards the official documentation is very bleak. We have a virtual monopoly of schooling and a far-reaching government curriculum which is to be mandated for all state schools and which seeks to force on all children

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<sup>20</sup> Oakeshott, M (1972), "Education: the Engagement and the Frustration", in Dearden R F, Hirst, PH, and Peters, R S (eds), *Education and the Development of Reason*, Routledge, London.

particular and contentious views about the nature of humanity, how our society should be understood, and the way in which people should live.

Of course what happens in schools and classrooms is not necessarily as laid down in the official curricula, and we can be thankful for that. To slightly misquote C S Lewis, again from his *The Abolition of Man*, we can, in the face of much official educational nonsense thank the benign obstinacy of real parents, real teachers and, above all, real children for such sanity as humanity still possesses.

I think we have to go on critiquing the official position and pointing out the inconsistencies to which it leads and the dubious assumptions on which it is built while being open to the real difficulties and dilemmas involved.

What we need to push for is not that everybody should agree with a Christian position on morals (and there can be more than one such position) or any other particular philosophical or religious perspective. What, I suggest, we need to press for is a situation of mutual disengagement. This requires the government to exercise its own role in a respectful, cautious way, mindful of the many other sources of moral instruction in society, not least parents and religious organisations, and its own limitations in this regard. Equally all parents should be enabled as far as possible to choose the type of schooling – government or private – for their children that accords with their philosophical or religious preferences and their views about the educational environment in which their children can best be educated. But it also requires that those with particular views, religious or otherwise, do not seek to force their own views on others.

Of course, the law of the land must be respected. But, far from risking social upheaval, we would, I suggest, all get on with each other a lot better without the government's current curricular constraints and restrictions.

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<sup>21</sup> Gramsci, A (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebook*, (trans. and ed. Q Hoare and G N Smith), London.